

EXHIBIT 2

Robbery investigated for link to escapees

By Jennifer Emily

Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

Authorities are investigating whether a Sunday morning robbery in South Dallas County can be linked to the seven prison escapees accused of killing an Irving police officer.

The robbery is one of many being examined statewide for connections to the group accused of robbing an Oshman's sporting goods store in Irving on Christmas Eve, said Texas Department of Criminal Justice spokesman Larry Todd. Irving police

Officer Aubrey Hawkins was killed in the robbery.

The fugitives are two murderers, two armed robbers, a serial rapist, a child abuser and a residential burglar.

"I would be almost certain that any robbery that takes place now is going to be looked at to see if it can be linked to these guys," said Carole Young, vice president of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice, who is briefed daily about new developments.

Sunday morning, a fireworks stand on unincorporated land near Hutchins was robbed by three men. Two employees sleeping inside were tied up but not injured. The robbers got away with money, a pistol, fireworks and a pickup truck.

"We are not confirming that" the fireworks stand robbers were the escapees, Mr. Todd said. "We have had other robberies throughout the state and we are not confirming that the escapees are connected to any of them. Nor are we going to speculate."

Tips about the escapees continue to pour in, authorities said.

Officials said the search for the escapees and the possibility of another incident over the holiday weekend have law enforcement on high alert.

"With the last one happening on Christmas Eve, you have to be concerned," Ms. Young said. "I don't

know if you can be any more alert than they already are. But there's concern."

The heightened concern was evident Sunday afternoon when a Plano police tactical team surrounded a Best Buy at Parker Road and Central Expressway in what turned out to be a false alarm.

An alarm went off at the store about 1:30 p.m., and no one answered the phone when Plano police called the store, said Lt. Terry Groves, a Plano police shift commander. Officers were dispatched to the store about a possible robbery in progress.

"I think to a degree this would have been normal, but I think that there was a heightened awareness because of the current situation," Lt. Groves said. "I think the officers are more cognizant of their surroundings when they respond to calls like this."

The mother of a store employee said she came to the store after her son, 18-year-old Justin Talbott, called to tell her the store was being robbed.

"He told me they had locked down the store and police were securing the store. One of the employees in the store called 911," said Cathy Talbott of Plano. "They were telling people to get down and wait for the police. The managers pulled all the money drawers and locked them in the safe."

Best Buy employees declined to comment after police left and the store reopened for business.

'Be still or we'll shoot'

In the earlier incident Sunday near Hutchins, three armed men wearing camouflage clothes and bandanas robbed the Alamo Fireworks stand at 1:40 a.m. at Interstate 45 and Wintergreen Road, said Dallas County Sheriff's Department spokesman Investigator Don Peritz. "They said, 'Be cool, be still or we'll shoot you.' They started rummaging through our stuff and took our money from that day and the day

before," said Chris Clausen, 22, of Grapevine, one of the employees whom the robbers tied up with duct tape. "They said to do what they said, because they had been in prison and were not going back."

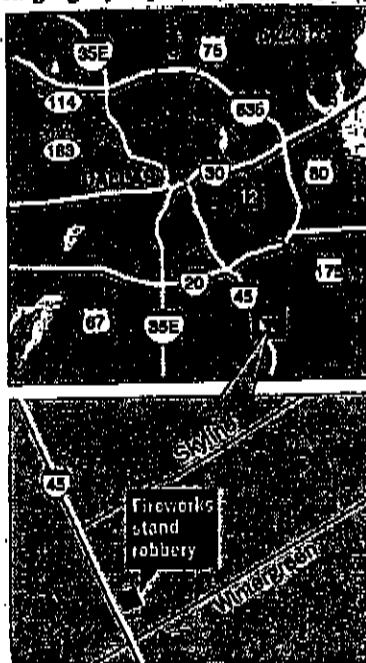
Mr. Clausen said that there were three robbers in the store but that they appeared to be communicating with two others who were outside. Of the three inside, Mr. Clausen said he could see only one. Before the men left, he said, they told him and his brother, Nelson Clausen, 25, not to do anything for 30 minutes because they would be watching.

The brothers crawled through a window to get out of the building after freeing themselves of the tape, Chris Clausen said.

Mr. Clausen described the ordeal as frightening.

"It was quite an experience, one I'd like not to repeat again. I'm just glad I'm here for the new year," Chris Clausen said Sunday night.

The robbers — one of whom had a 12-gauge pump shotgun — stole a



THE ESCAPEES



Joseph C. Garcia
■ Age: 29
■ Hometown: San Antonio
■ Sentence: 50 years for murder



Randy Ethan Halpin
■ Age: 23
■ Hometown: McKinney
■ Sentence: 30 years for injury to a child in Arlington



Lary James Harper
■ Age: 37
■ Hometown: Danville, Ill.
■ Sentence: 50 years for aggravated sexual assault with a deadly weapon in El Paso



Patrick Henry Murphy Jr.
■ Age: 39
■ Hometown: Dallas
■ Sentence: 50 years for aggravated sexual assault with a deadly weapon in Austin



Donald Keith Newbury
■ Age: 38
■ Hometown: Albuquerque, N.M.
■ Sentence: life sentence for aggravated robbery with a deadly weapon in Austin



George Rivas
■ Age: 30
■ Hometown: El Paso
■ Sentence: life sentence for aggravated kidnapping, aggravated robbery

Michael Anthony Rodriguez
■ Age: 38
■ Hometown: San Antonio
■ Sentence: life sentence for capital murder



SOURCE: Texas Department of Criminal Justice

1998 metallic blue Dodge Dakota pickup with Texas license plate 1BTN60, a .38-caliber pistol, fireworks, a cell phone and about \$3,400, Investigator Peritz and the Clausens said.

The brothers were not injured and were able to flag down a Hutchins police officer just after 3 a.m. as they walked north on I-45. Employees told sheriff's deputies that the robbers said they were "not going back to prison," Investigator Peritz said.

'Connally Seven'

"We're not sure if it was the Connally Seven," Investigator Peritz said. "We're depending on the task force to confirm."

The seven men escaped from the Connally Unit of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice near Kenedy in South Texas on Dec. 13. The task force — including the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the Department of Public Safety, the FBI, the Texas Rangers and the Irving Police Department — is investigating the

fireworks stand robbery and several other robberies to determine whether the seven escapees were involved, Mr. Todd said.

Mr. Todd said Sunday that officials had gained no promising new leads in their efforts to track down the escapees.

In the Irving robbery, authorities said, the robbers stole Officer Hawkins' gun after shooting him and then ran over him. The robbers stole more than 25 semiautomatic firearms, ammunition, winter clothing and about \$70,000 in cash and checks, authorities said. Those weapons are in addition to the shotgun, rifle and 14 handguns taken from the prison.

Rewards total \$100,000

Authorities also believe that two of the seven escapees — 30-year-old George Rivas and 38-year-old Donald Keith Newbury — are responsible for a Dec. 15 robbery of a Radio Shack in Pearland, a Houston suburb. No one was injured in that robbery but the men stole police scanners and other ra-

dio equipment, which authorities said has made it easier for them to elude police.

The Pearland Police Department has issued warrants for the arrest of Mr. Rivas, who authorities believe is the group's leader, and Mr. Newbury.

Authorities believe that the men had outside aid in their prison escape. They have not indicated whether they have suspects.

"These guys have got to eat and sleep and buy groceries. They're out there somewhere," Ms. Young said. "We need to know where they're getting their help. They're going to surface. It may be through one of these robberies. It may be something else."

Rewards for information leading to the capture of the escapees total \$100,000.

Anyone with information about the whereabouts of the escapees or offenses they may have committed may call 1-800-737-8143, *DPS on a cellular phone or 911.

Staff Writer Ian McCann contributed to this report.